

# Step by Step to a Healthy Lifestyle

## *What Walking Does for the Body and Mind*

***Just put one foot in front of the other... and there you have it. Walking is such an ordinary part of the human experience that its potential health benefits can be hard to believe. Yet walking can help prevent or control many common, serious maladies – and may even help people live longer. The following recent findings show what walking can do for your body and mind.***

### **Reduced risk of heart attack**

Women who walked briskly 3 or more hours a week had 35% fewer coronary events than women who walked infrequently, according to a study of nearly 72,500 female nurses published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, August 1999.

Researchers concluded the heart health benefits from brisk walking are similar to those from jogging, aerobics, or other types of strenuous physical activity. Other 1999 research published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that walking more than an hour a week can reduce the risk of a first heart attack by 73%, similar to the effects of high-intensity exercise.

### **Lower risk of stroke**

Walking more than 20 kilometers a week (12.5 miles) is associated with a significantly lower risk of stroke, states a 1998 study in *Stroke*, a journal of the American Heart Association. An analysis of the Nurses' Health Study published in 2000 (*Journal of the American Medical Association*) found that physical activity, including moderate intensity forms such as walking, may substantially lower risk of

total and ischemic stroke in women – and the more exercise, the greater the benefit. [JAMA, 2000;283: 2961-2967]

### **Decreased risk of breast cancer**

Breast cancer rates were reduced by 20% among women who engaged in 7 hours a week of moderate to vigorous exercise such as brisk walking, according to a separate analysis of the Nurses' Health Study published in *Archives of Internal Medicine*, October 1999.

### **Lower weight and cholesterol levels**

Men who walked 18 holes of golf twice a week burned 1750 calories a round; over 5 months, they lost an average of 5 pounds and 8% of their abdominal fat, found a study in *The American Journal of Medicine*. Their HDL ("good cholesterol") levels rose 5%; LDL ("bad cholesterol") levels fell 4%.

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### **Exercise Has Gotten Easier**

*You don't have to engage in strenuous physical activity to enjoy significant health benefits – moderate intensity activity such as walking often produces similar effects, recent research shows. What's more, the health benefits appear to be the same whether activity is completed in a continuous session or broken into short blocks throughout the day. Many health experts recommend at least 30 minutes of exercise a day, most days of the week.*

# Step by Step to a Healthy Lifestyle (Continued)

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### **Reduced risk of glaucoma**

Sedentary individuals who walked at least 40 minutes a day, 3 times a week, at 60% of their maximum heart rate experienced an average 9% reduction in intraocular eye pressure, according to a study of 38 people by Oregon Health Sciences University researchers.

### **Lower diabetes risk**

Walking briskly 1 hour each day can cut in half a woman's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, October 1999.

### **Increased longevity**

Women who engaged in moderate exercise at least once a week were 24% less likely to die prematurely, indicated a 7-year study of 40,000 women by University of Michigan researchers, reported in a 1977 Mayo Clinic Newsletter. In addition, brisk walking for half an hour just 6 times a month decreased the risk of premature death among men and women by 44%, said a 1998 *Journal of the American Medical*

Association study. Retired men (average age 69) who walked 2 or more miles a day were 40% less likely to die from any cause than men the same age who walked under a mile, according to a 12-year study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (January 1998). Other research has found similar results in women.

### **The list goes on**

Additional research shows that walking can lower the incidence of depression, decrease disability rates among seniors, control high blood pressure, reduce risk of developing colon cancer, and relieve osteoporosis, arthritis, and back pain. Not bad for just putting one foot in front of the other-right?

## **Stepping Up the Pace**

To achieve many of the health benefits of walking, an idle stroll won't do — brisk walking is called for, at about 3 miles an hour or faster. For an efficient workout when walking briskly:

- Warm up at a slow, easy pace for 5 minutes at the start of your walk; similarly, cool down for 5 minutes at the end
- Take small, quick steps; overly long strides can lead to foot and leg injury
- With each step, land on your heel, roll your foot from heel to toe, then push off with the toes
- Tuck the muscles of your abdomen and buttocks in as you walk
- Keep your head up, chin level, chest up, shoulders back; look at the path ahead of you, not down toward the ground.

*Be sure to check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise routine.*